

Reading and Misreading V. Gordon Childe in North America

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In North America, as in the rest of the world, V. Gordon Childe is one of the best-known and most cited archaeologists of the 20th century. Childe had a long and significant association with North American anthropology and archaeology¹ (Peace 1988). Many of his ideas had a profound influence on North American scholarship that continues until today. North American archaeologists, however, never quite knew what to make of Childe and his theory. Throughout most of the second half of the century they consistently misread Childe, labeling him first a diffusionist, then as a neo-evolutionist. On the one hand, they correlated his concerns with history, diffusion, and archaeological cultures with a normative culture history. On the other hand, he seemed a neo-evolutionary materialist who took a systemic view of society, studied evolutionary change and searched for patterning in the archaeological record. Yet his ideas never fit easily into the pigeonholes of culture history or cultural evolution, and few North American archaeologists studied his writings on society and knowledge. It was only at the end of the 20th century, when a handful of Anglophone archaeologists became serious about reading Marx, that scholars in North America began to study, understand and employ the totality of Childe's thought (Patterson 2003).

Childe in the United States

At the end of the great depression, on the eve of the Second World War, North American intellectuals had a momentary yet intense interest in radical visions of the world. The ideas of Sigmund Freud took hold in the universities and in parlor room conversations. Museums, universities and even leading industrialists such as Nelson Rockefeller invited leftist Mexican muralists Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco to decorate American walls with their art. As Fleeing Hitler, the Marxist Frankfurt Institute relocated to Columbia University in New York City. The Marxist playwright Bertolt Brecht soon followed setting his plays on Broadway stages and writing the screenplay for a Hollywood movie. In this milieu, several prominent American universities invited V. Gordon Childe to the United States and honored him as an eminent scholar.

Childe visited the United States three times during the 1930's (Trigger 1980: Peace 1988). In 1936, he traveled to Boston for a conference, and Harvard University awarded him the degree of Honorary Doctor of Letters. In 1937, the University of Pennsylvania honored Childe with the degree of Honorary Doctor of Science. In 1939, he taught as at the University of California at Berkeley as a visiting professor during the summer session. On these trips he crisscrossed the United States by train. His travels took him to Boston, New York, Philadelphia,

Tucson, Ann Arbor, Berkeley and Chicago. The honors extended to Childe during these visits indicate that American scholars already knew of his work on European prehistory and the relationship of that history to the Near East. Childe would have his greatest impact on North American archaeology, however, through the collegial connections that he made on his visits to the United States.

Once Childe returned to England, he engaged in regular correspondence with prominent North American anthropologists and archaeologists (Peace 1988). Among these scholars were A. L. Kroeber, Leslie White, E.A. Hooton, Carleton Coon, Irving Rouse, Robert Redfield and Robert Braidwood. His interactions with Robert Braidwood of the University of Chicago would be important and far reaching. As a result of this correspondence he would have his greatest impact on North American scholarship in the years following the Second World War. Following the war, the faculty of anthropology at the University of Chicago prepared a self-guided course in anthropology called *Human Origins* for returning veterans and Braidwood solicited extensive writings from Childe to include in the course (Trigger 1980:126-127). The ethnographer Robert Redfield of the University of Chicago was one of the first North American scholars to seriously engage in a critique of Childe's theories. Redfield (1953: 24) questioned Childe's theory of revolutions in prehistory and argued instead that the beginnings of agriculture and the rise of cities had been gradual transformations. Braidwood (1974) went to Jarmo in Iraq to test Childe's oasis theory for the agricultural revolution.

In postwar Chicago, Braidwood trained a generation of archaeology students in Childe's work. The most important of these would be Richard McNeish (1974) and Robert McCormick Adams (Yoffee 1997). McNeish (1974) studied Childe at Chicago and took the search for the agricultural revolution to central México. Adams (Yoffee 1997) accompanied his professor to Jarmo and then established himself as a prominent scholar of the prehistoric Near East. In 1956, the year before Childe's death, Adams traveled to London to meet the man himself. Adams' (1966) seminal work, *Evolution of Urban Society*, sought to explain Childe's urban revolution through a comparison of historical developments in the Near East and Mesoamerica. In 1959, Joseph Caldwell (1959) wrote in the journal *Science* that American archaeology had taken a fundamentally new direction following World War II, and he credited Childe as a major force driving that change.

Even as Childe's influence on North American archaeology rose his political favor with the United States government fell. Like many other radicals who had been welcomed to the U.S. in the 1930s, including Bertolt Brecht and Diego Rivera, Childe found himself barred from post-war America. The U.S. government's attempt to control and expel aliens who held leftist political views began with the Alien Registration Act of 1940 that required all aliens residing in the United States to register and state their political views. This fear of leftist ideas and communism grew after the war, and active persecution of both foreign and domestic leftists continued until the late 1950s. During this period of McCarthyism, the federal government censured the American media, the academy, the press, and libraries, and routinely denied foreigners entry into the country based on their political views. After the war, Leslie White and Robert Braidwood tried to get Childe back to the United States as a visiting scholar, and Harvard University considered offering him an academic position. Despite this interest Childe never again visited North America (Peace 1988). Apparently the United States State Department declared Childe *persona non grata* in 1945 because he had represented Great Britain at the 220th anniversary celebration of the Soviet Academy of Sciences held in Moscow and Leningrad

(Rouse 1958:83). Childe jested with his graduate students in London that it would be easier for him to get into heaven than into the United States (Peace 1988:419).

The historical influence of Marxist thought, on American archaeology including that of Childe, is often hidden, blurred and fragmentary (McGuire 1992:53-89). McCarthyism insulated U.S. archaeologists from Marxist ideas, but the barrier was never impermeable (Patterson 2003:63). For ideas to pass the barrier they usually had to be encrypted, disguised, or expressed as euphemisms. The effects of McCarthyism lingered in the United States long after the witch-hunts of that epoch had been discredited, and it was only in the later half of the 1960s that scholars could openly advocate Marxist positions. It should not surprise us, therefore, that much of Childe's influence on North American archaeology followed indirect and clandestine paths. In Peru, the avocational archaeologist Larco Hoyal read Childe and formulated his own theory of cultural evolution. Julian Steward derived his ideas on cultural evolution from Hoyal and passed them along to his students, including Gordon Willey (Patterson 2003:58). At Columbia, a group of radical anthropology students including Eric Wolf, John Murra, Eleanor Leacock, Sidney Mintz, Morton Fried, and Elman Service formed a covert study group called "The Mundial Upheaval Society," and one of the major scholars they read was Childe (Peace 1988:422). In the 1970s, these radical students would define an American anthropological political economy. In México, a group of Republican Spanish Civil War veterans that included Pedro Armillas, Angel Palarm and Pedro Carrasco became prominent in Mexican anthropology and archaeology. They read Childe, and one of their foremost students Jose Luis Lorenzo traveled to London to study with Childe. On the seminal Valley of México Project of the 1950 and 1960s, these Hispanic anthropologists worked with and influenced U.S. scholars, including the ethnographer Eric Wolf and the archaeologist René Millon (McGuire 1992:65; Patterson 2003:61).

Childe had his greatest influence on North American archaeology during the Cold War, when most U.S. scholars found Marxism problematic and dangerous. At the time of his death, even Childe's friends sought to sidestep or disavow Childe's Marxism. In an obituary for Childe, Braidwood (1958:73) quoted Mortimer Wheeler saying, "Childe's Marxism colored rather than shaped his interpretations." As a result of this disdain for Marxism, an entire generation of archaeologists read Childe without an understanding of the dialectical thinking and Marxist theory on which he based his ideas. These archaeologists have carried this misreading to generations of North American students up to today.

The 1980s witnessed a flowering of alternative archaeologies in Anglophone scholarship, including feminist, post-processualist, and Marxist (Fernández, 2006). For the first time, some North American archaeologists adopted an explicitly Marxist theory of archaeology (McGuire 1992; Patterson 2003). These archaeologists read Childe to gain an understanding of dialectical thinking and Marxist theory. The Canadian Bruce Trigger (1980) wrote a biography entitled *Gordon Childe: Revolutions in Archaeology* that used a Marxist light to illuminate North Americans' misreading of Childe. Trigger's biography joined numerous British works in an early 1980's "let-us-know-Childe-better movement" (McNair 1980; Green 1981; Gathercole 1983; Tringham 1983:87). At the beginning of the 21st century, the U.S. archaeologist Thomas Patterson (2003) wrote a book exploring the influences of Marxism on archaeology. Patterson credits Childe for initiating and defining archaeology's conversation with Marx. Marxism remains a small and somewhat disparaged theoretical current in North American archaeology and for this reason the Cold War misreadings of Childe continue.

The “let-us-know-Childe-better movement” generally divided Childe’s scholarship into three temporal and topical units (McNairn 1980; Green 1981; Gathercole 1983; Tringham 1983:87). They begin with Childe’s earliest work on the prehistory of Europe and his definition of the culture complex and use of diffusion. In the 1930’s, Childe shifted his emphasis to issues of cultural evolution and broad synthesis of developments in Europe and the Near East. Finally, in the post-war period, Childe turned to more philosophical issues related to knowledge and society. The most fundamental North American misreading of Childe treats each of these units as distinct and as in conflict with each other.

Culture and Diffusion

Childe’s (1925, 1926, 1928, 1929, 1930) earliest research focused on the prehistory of Europe, the definition of archaeological cultures, and the diffusion of ideas. A persistent Eurocentrism would guide Childe’s interests and ideas throughout his life. This Eurocentrism was readily apparent in Childe’s knowledge and opinions of the culture history of the Americas (Flannery 1995). He apparently read very little about the prehistory of north, south or central America (Trigger 1980:126). Glynn Daniels (1973:343) once observed that Childe found the prehistory of the Americas “bizarre, unpalatable and irrelevant.” In the first half of the 20th century, few North American archaeologists read European prehistory, and virtually none worked in Europe (only slightly more do today). Despite these regionalisms, Childe did enter into a spirited and productive interaction with North American ethnographers and archaeologists about the concept of culture.

Childe derived his initial concept of an archaeological culture from the German archaeologist, Gustaf Kossina who had built his notions on the work of late 19th century German geographers, especially Friedrich Ratzel (Stocking 1998). Also derived from German geography was the idea that these cultures changed over time due to the invention of new ideas, the diffusion of these ideas to new cultures, and the migration of cultural groups. In his book *The Danube in Prehistory*, Childe defined an archaeological culture as a complex of types of remains including artifacts, house forms, and burial forms that consistently reoccurred together (Childe 1929:v-vi). Kossina equated archaeological cultures with races, and he sought to trace the migration of the German race over the map of Europe. Childe tried to counter this racist notion by demonstrating that archaeological cultures primarily changed due to diffusion and thus did not differ in terms of creativity, intelligence, or accomplishments.

At the beginning of the 20th century, North American ethnographers and archaeologists shared a very similar idea of culture with parallel German roots, but they did not derive this idea from either Kossina or Childe. Franz Boas introduced German notions of culture and of invention, diffusion and migration to American anthropology at the end of the 19th century. Like Childe, Boas rejected Ratzel’s and Kossina’s emphasis on migration that led to a racist ranking of cultures as inferior or superior (Stocking 1998). He stressed the fluidity of cultural change and the inherent worth of each culture. By the time Childe began his work on European prehistory in the mid-1920s, this more liberal German view of culture and cultural change already dominated North American ethnography and archaeology. Boas introduced these ideas as a four-field anthropology. American anthropology was founded in the study of American Indians to include biological anthropology, ethnography, linguistics, and archaeology. This four-field approach fit with Childe’s theory, because he saw archaeology and ethnology as complementary and interdependent branches of a unified science (Trigger 1980:129). Childe came to the United

States in the 1930s in part, to connect with American anthropology (Peace 1988). Because of the parallels in theory, Childe found it easy to enter into a dialogue with leading North American ethnographers, and biological anthropologists such as Boas, Kroeber and Hooton, and to join into North American theoretical debates about the nature of culture.

Childe and Boas both saw their research as political. They shared the conviction that anthropological/archaeological research should challenge intolerance, enhance cross-cultural understanding and combat racism (Peace 1988:429). Both men used their left reading German culture theory to actively confront Fascism and question baseless prejudice. Each man also suffered derision and criticism for their explicit linking of research to political goals.

One product of a Boasian view of culture in North American archaeology was the McKern Classification System. This system classified archaeological remains typologically into a hierarchy of levels based on reoccurring complexes of types. It became the dominant system of classification for archaeological remains in eastern North America. Childe (1935:3) objected to the McKern system because his emphasis on the dynamics of culture led him to reject the idea of cultures as dead organisms. Instead he stressed function and the internal workings of culture over typological classification (Peace 1988:423). Through the 1930s Childe further refined his notion of culture to be more dynamic and based in human experience (Patterson 2003:43-44). By the mid-1930s he defined culture as the whole life of a community and later he gendered his definition when he defined society as men and women with a common culture. At the end of his life he had developed a very contemporary view of culture as the arena in which people live and experience daily life (Childe 1946:243-250). In this ultimate formulation, Childe defined culture in terms of labor and found the motor of social change in contradictions between production, society, culture and ideology (Patterson 2003:44-45). Childe's fully developed concept of culture, with its emphasis on lived experience, is one that would be accepted by many contemporary North American archaeologists, including Marxists and numerous others.

Childe's theory of culture had very little impact on North American archaeologists in the first half of the 20th century, because his ideas substantially overlapped existing ideas of culture in American archaeology. Following the Second World War, the New Archaeologists embraced Childe as one of the founding fathers of Neo-Evolutionism (Binford 1972:79-80; Trigger 1980:11). They either did not read, or misread, his evolving theory of culture. They thus dismissed his ideas on culture as diffusionist and relics of an older traditional culture history (Binford 1983:3, 399). They saw an inexorable break between Childe the diffusionist and Childe the neo-evolutionist. In the 1980s, North American archaeologists developing an alternative archaeology to the processual archaeology read Childe's evolving ideas on culture and found that he had forged a path before them.

Cultural Evolution

In the first half of the 20th century, many North American anthropologists equated cultural evolution with Marxism and communism in the Soviet Union. The prominent American ethnographer Robert Lowie (1937) framed a caricature of Marxism as a theory of economic determinism and unilineal evolution that endured in North American anthropology nearly to the end of the century. In the early 1950s, Julian Steward wrongly characterized Childe as a modern day unilineal evolutionist and chastised him for only speaking of culture as a whole and for not dealing with individual cultures. He equated Childe's approach to cultural evolution with that of Lewis Henry Morgan and Leslie White (Peace 1988:420). This critique distanced Steward's

own theory from unilineal ideas and the taint of Marxism. Other critics repeated Steward's critique without a careful reading of Childe (Peace 1988:420). Soon only White (1959:110-115) seemed to recognize that Childe's theory differed from White's own unabashed unilineal evolution. North American advocates of cultural evolution also sought to distance them from the explicit political, activist content of Childe's work. As Patterson (2003:61) has pointed out, none of them discussed exploitation, class struggle or the oppressive character of class relations and state formation. They tended to see these things as a natural or necessary outcome of the rise of civilization.

In the late 1930s, Childe formulated his approach to cultural evolution (Trigger 1980:128-135). Childe (1934) first discussed agricultural and urban revolutions in his book *New Light on the Most Ancient East*. In all of his efforts, he discussed cultural evolution in substantive terms to account for historical developments in the Near East and Europe. He did not engage in the kind of polemic that characterized White's writings on the topic nor did he develop a theory applicable to all contexts. Indeed, one of the reasons he did not read about the archaeology of the Americas was because he did not believe his ideas about cultural evolution worked there (Peace 1988:428).

Childe (1943a) argued that archaeology should be a historical, human science. He recognized that archaeologists could learn a great deal from the natural sciences, but he rejected the idea that the methods or concepts of the natural sciences could be applied without modification to the study of prehistory (Patterson 2003: 43). He stressed the need for generalizations and for the development of evolutionary laws. But, for Childe such laws did not transcend time and space. Universal laws or truths could only exist if human nature and/or society were fixed and immutable. The Marxist dialectic that Childe embraced began with the principle that both human nature and society are constantly changing (Trigger 1980:131-132; Patterson 2003:45). Since generalization was possible but the laws of cultural evolution could not transcend empirical cases, history for Childe was genuinely creative and unpredictable. Childe (1946:248) summarized his position by saying evolution was what happened in history. Thus, Childe regarded archaeology as pre-eminently a font of history rather than a search for universal laws. From a dialectical perspective he saw no dichotomy between history and evolution, and he linked diffusion and evolution in his substantive studies (Trigger 1980:135, 173).

As White attempted to engage Childe in polemical debate, archaeologists at Chicago sought to substantively evaluate his ideas (Peace 1988). Braidwood (1974) went to Turkey and MacNeish (1974) went to México to evaluate Childe's notion of an agricultural revolution. Both found processes that they regarded as more evolutionary than revolutionary. Their work inspired North American archaeologists to undertake a host of research around the world looking for agricultural origins. Adams' (1966) comparative study of the rise of urbanism in the Near East and Mesoamerica represented the most sophisticated and insightful postwar North American consideration of Childe's revolutions. Like Childe, Adams treated evolution as what happened in history and did not seek universal laws or processes. He, however, derived his method of controlled historical comparison from Steward and it differed from Childe's historical approach. His book also introduced North American archaeologists to Childe's list of 10 criteria to identify a civilization (Yoffee 1997). From the 1960s until near the end of the century, the search for the origins of agriculture and the origins of civilization (or the state) were the two big questions for North American archaeology.

The New Archaeologists of the 1960s sought to revolutionize archaeology, and they identified Childe as a comrade in arms. Lewis Binford (1972: 52, 71, 79) cited Childe to give precedent to Binford's positions that archaeology is a science, that reasoning from ethnographic analogy is faulty, and that archaeologists should study processes of cultural change. Binford (1972:61) read Childe's (1943b) article on archaeology in the USSR and noted Childe's description of the work of the Soviet archaeologist Tretyakov. Tretyakov proposed the notion that if women were the potters in a society, and that if the society was matrilineal, then archaeologists should find less formal variation in ceramic design within communities than they would if the society was patrilineal. Binford's students William Longacre (1970) and James Hill (1970) adopted this assumption to do their seminal studies on ancestral pueblo social organization. These studies initiated the approach that would come to be known as processual archaeology.

By and large, however, the New Archaeologists misread Childe. They tended to conclude that Childe was a unilineal evolutionist whose views corresponded in large part with those of White. They had been educated during the era of McCarthyism, and few of them had read or understood Marx. They did not appreciate the dialectical thinking of Childe and instead framed their theory in terms of categorical oppositions, mentalism vs materialism, history vs evolution, humanism vs science and explanation vs description. They equated culture history with processes of invention, diffusion, and migration and rejected this as a valid way to understand prehistory. They advocated instead a functionalism whereby environmental adaptation determined cultural change and variation. They embraced a positivist epistemology that sought universal laws of cultural evolution, and they argued that the methods and concepts of the natural sciences could be applied directly to the study of culture. They tended to view human nature as fixed and immutable, assuming, for example, that people would always seek to minimize effort and to maximize gain, or that human populations would inherently grow. Because they did not realize how fundamentally Childe's theory and epistemology differed from theirs, they could not reconcile Childe the prehistorian with Childe the evolutionist, or Childe the humanist with Childe the scientist, or perhaps most importantly, Childe the Marxist with Childe the scholar.

Virtually every archaeological textbook published in the United States from Braidwood's (1948) *Prehistoric Men* to the dozen or more used in today's classrooms discuss Childe as a neo-evolutionist. In the vast majority of these, he appears twice. The books introduce the big question of the origins of agriculture by first discussing Childe's oasis theory for the origin of agriculture in the Near East. They initiate the second big question of the origin of civilization and the state by invoking Childe's 10 archaeological criteria for a civilization. Today in the United States, this brief and often misleading presentation of Childe in introductory textbooks is the main or only exposure that most archaeology students have to V. Gordon Childe.

Knowledge and Society

In the 1940s, Childe began to write about the nature of knowledge and its relationship to society (Trigger 1980:136). Childe turned his attention to the nature of knowledge claims after World War II, when the failings of the Bolshevism of the Soviet state became apparent to scholars in the West (McGuire 1992:25-32). Childe (1989:15-17) would later call Stalinism, "the Marxist perversion of Marxism". With this critique, Childe became very concerned about the nature of knowledge and how we as scholars create it. He rejected notions of laws that

determined social change. He saw knowledge as complexly created and always subject to revision. His discussion of the nature of knowledge presaged current debates in Anglophone archaeology by a generation.

In *The Sociology of Knowledge*, Childe (1949) argued that the function, structure and content of knowledge is social and relates to action. The function of knowledge is social since it provides rules for co-operative social action. The content of knowledge is also social, since it provides a working model of the “real world” that must be accurate enough for a society to act. But, a society's knowledge is not always progressive, and critique is necessary to reveal this. For Childe, the convergence between knowledge as a model of the “real world” and that society's means of production provide the measure of a society's fitness to survive. Individual delusions or social illusions could hamper a society's knowledge, or ability to act and progress (Childe 1956:115). Such delusions may serve the particular interests of classes or specific groups, and at the same time be a buttress to the authority of the ruling class (Childe 1949:308). These delusions transform knowledge and science into ideology, and this ideology becomes a brake upon the progress of knowledge (Childe 1949:309). Childe saw the development of knowledge as a dialectic in which people achieved understanding through the negation of error (Trigger 1980a:141). He (Childe 1947: 93) argued that all scientific knowledge is practical and must furnish rules for action. For Childe (1947:83), the ultimate goal of scientific history, or the accumulation of practical knowledge of the past, is to “enable the sober citizen to discern the pattern the process has been weaving in the past and from there to estimate how it may be continued in the immediate future.”

In the 1980s, Childe's ideas once again came to the attention of North American scholars via a twisted and somewhat covert path. In the manifesto of the British post-processual archaeology, *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* (Hodder 1982), the authors advocated a reactionary view that harkened back to the humanism of Childe and his recognition that scholars construct knowledge. The U.S. archaeologist Mark Leone (1982), in his commentary on the volume, called the post-processualists “Childe's Offspring”. However, like the neo-evolutionists of a generation before, the post-processualists picked and chose from Childe's thought, this time selecting the humanistic and critical bits of Childe's ideas while discarding the scientific and materialist aspects. Most North American archaeologists read the post-processualists gleanings without fully understanding their origins.

For others in North America, the totality of Childe's work became the starting point for integrating Classical Marxism into archaeology (Trigger 1984, 1985, 1993; Muller 1997; Patterson 2003). These archaeologists rejected the basic tenets of the New Archaeology. Bruce Trigger (1978) found in the works of V. Gordon Childe critical dialectics between history and evolution, theory and data, and mentalism and materialism that he thought lacking in the New Archaeology. In the early 1960s, Thomas Patterson (1973, 1989, 2003) came in contact with Marxist political thought in Peru. He increasingly saw it as a useful theoretical perspective for archaeology. By the 1970s, Marxism had attracted the interest of a handful U.S. archaeologists. Among these was Phil Kohl who, in the 1970s, turned to Marx as an alternative to processual archaeological approaches to exchange and production (Kohl 1975, 1985).

Other North American archaeologists read Childe in his totality but adopted Marxist approaches that emphasized critique more than Childe had, or embraced a more humanistic notion of Marxism than Childe's. Mark Leone and his students (1986, 1995, 2005; Palus et al 2006) developed a critical archaeology derived from an understanding of French structural

Marxism and the Frankfurt School. Critical archaeology stresses critique and consciousness raising as the way to action, as opposed to Childe's idea that knowledge provides rules for action. The Columbia University students who had read Childe and other radical thinkers in the Mundial Upheaval Society of the late 1940s went on to establish an American anthropological political economy (Leacock 1972; Wolf 1959, 1982; Mintz 1986; Nash 1993). They inspired a third cohort of North American archaeologists (Crumley and Marquardt 1987; Marquardt 1992; McGuire 1992, 2008; Paynter 1999; Wurst 2006; Saitta 2007) to develop a more humanistic approach to archaeology. These archaeologists also do not see knowledge as providing rules for action but rather see knowledge as resulting from the interaction of critique, observations of the real world and action in the world.

The Canadian archaeologist Bruce Trigger has explicitly carried forward the work of Childe (McGuire 2006). It is clear that Childe had a seminal influence on his thought. In equal measure, however, Trigger has been the scholar most responsible for formulating a coherent, contemporary understanding of Childe for archaeology. Trigger (1980: 19) plumbed the depth of Childe's thinking to reveal the ways in which "Childe's thought continues to constitute and important challenge to archaeology".

For Trigger and Childe, the ultimate goal of anthropological scholarship is to transform the social world. Trigger urges us to work towards a society that is technologically advanced, culturally diverse, egalitarian in both its economy and politics, and in which all people share in both the rewards and responsibilities of living on this earth. He finds the means to this goal in a critical awareness of the social and political context of archaeological scholarship and in a search for knowledge. In the last decade, Trigger (2003a) has made the political implications of his research more overt.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the popularity of cultural evolution has declined in North American archaeology. Trigger (1998:xi) equates the rejection of sociocultural evolution with the extreme relativism of the post-processual Archaeology. In his book *Sociocultural Evolution*, Trigger (1998) provides a critical historical analysis. He examines the concept both in terms of the social and political contexts of its formulation and use, and in terms of its relationship to the accumulation of knowledge about the past. Like Childe he rejects unilineal idea of cultural evolution and instead proposes a contextualized idea of cultural evolution as what happened in history. He recognizes that varied political and social agendas have used sociocultural evolution and that the concept has carried heavy baggage of ethnocentrism (Trigger 1998: 225). He notes, however, that these problems spring from the political uses of the concept, and that they do not address the question of whether or not there is shape and direction to human history. He did not see racism and ethnocentrism as being inherent in sociocultural evolution. Trigger argues for sociocultural evolution to be an essential concept for understanding human history, ideas of determinism, inevitable directions of change, and value judgments must be discarded. Once archaeologists have done this, they can study sociocultural evolution within the historical contexts of real human life. He also maintains that the reality of sociocultural evolution demonstrates the falseness of the Conservative assertion that we are living at the "end of history," and that only free enterprise awaits our future (Trigger 1998:192-193, 256).

Trigger's last 10 years of research, culminating in *Understanding Early Civilizations* (Trigger 2003b), involves both a critique of the assumptions of neo-liberalism and of Marxist

treatments of human nature. This book parallels Childe's (1936) *Man Makes Himself* in its goals, in its scope and in its significance for the modern world. Trigger questions the Enlightenment assumption that humans are inherently altruistic. He argues that egalitarian relations in small-scale societies must be maintained by ridicule, gossip, and fear of witchcraft. Thus, hunter-gatherer societies do not provide a model for the future, but they do demonstrate that social and political egalitarianism is possible in human societies. His cross-cultural study of early civilizations indicates that these mechanisms fail with an increase in social complexity. He argues that the inevitable result of evolutionary changes in societies is institutionalized political, social and economic inequality. He recognizes that high-level decision-making is required in complex political systems, but that this does not explain why managerial elites appropriate top-heavy surpluses for their own use. He takes this as evidence that altruism is not inherent in the human condition, and that we cannot create more just societies simply by removing the corrupting influences of Capitalism. Rather we have to imagine and design control mechanisms that will work in technologically advanced large-scale societies in a manner analogous to the role of ridicule, gossip and fear of witchcraft in small-scale societies.

The Future of Childe in North America

The reading and misreading of V. Gordon Childe continues in North America. The vast majority of North American archaeologists know him only for the brief caricatures in textbooks of his revolutions in prehistory, his Oasis theory, and his ten archaeological criteria for civilizations. Childe is frequently quoted in North American archaeology, but he is rarely read. Childe's scholarship inspired and presaged the major concerns of archaeological theory in the 20th century. At the dawn of the 21st century, North American archaeologists are struggling with the relevance of archaeology to modern issues and with how to build archaeologies to meet the interests of different communities (Watkins 2000; Bernbeck 2003; Pollock 2003; Meskill and Pels 2005; Pyburn 2005; Hamilakas and Duke 2007; McGuire 2008). Yet again, Childe has preceded us in these considerations. In the 1930s, he recognized the role of prehistory in supporting the rise of Fascism in Germany. He asked and answered the question "Is Prehistory Practical" (Childe 1933) to confront Fascism. After the Second World War, he confronted the Soviet perversion of Marxism, and sought to build an approach to knowledge to contest it. Hopefully, my colleagues will transcend the misreadings and caricatures of Childe and read him once again as we confront these issues.

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ⁱ In most of the Americas (North America, Central America, and South America), prehistoric archaeology is not a separate discipline or a branch of history. It is part of a four-field discipline of anthropology that includes biological anthropology, ethnography, linguistics, and archaeology.